# Farewell to Somalia

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## ABSTRACT

Launched in December of 1992 to help save hundreds of thousands of Somalis from starvation in the face of massive civil unrest, Operation Provide Hope ended on March 25 with the departure from Somalia of all but about 60 U.S. troops. [SOLDIERS] The mission was abundant with both triumph and tragedy. Views from the soldiers are given.

## FULL TEXT

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FAREWELL TO SOMALIA
by Donna Miles and Spec. Bernadette Paris

The goodbye was far less dramatic than that first arrival, 16 months earlier, when Navy SEALS landed on a Mogadishu beach under the glare of hundreds of television lights.

No parades, no major speeches and no flag-lowering ceremony marked the official U.S. withdrawal from Somalia on March 25.

But on that day--a full week earlier than the target departure date set by President Bill Clinton--the U.S. role in Somalia came to a virtual close.

Operation Provide Hope was launched in December 1992 to help save hundreds of thousands of Somalis from starving in the face of civil unrest. At the operation's height in January 1993, the U.S. presence grew to 21,000 troops on the ground and another 4,400 afloat.

But on March 25, only about a dozen Army logistics and contracting officers, plus a 50-member Marine Corps embassy security force, remained behind. Also remaining were about 18,000 United Nations troops, most from India, Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. They were the last of what grew into a 22-nation United Nations force during Operation Continue Hope.

The backbone of that force was soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division, the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regt., as well as a support command that encompassed some 77 separate units.

To them went the task of carrying out a mission rife with both triumph and tragedy.

Television cameras--which before their arrival had focused on distended bellies and hopeless faces--now showed food convoys arriving at crowded feeding stations. Children smiled at the cameras, their faces smeared with an oatmeal-like gruel. Once again, fields were being cultivated and shops, schools and clinics reopened. And, for the first time since the country plunged into anarchy in 1991, death started to loosen its grip on the Somali people.

But the U.S. experience in Somalia wasn't without its heartache. Twenty-two soldiers died at the hands of rebel militiamen; 18 soldiers were killed in what is now referred to as the Battle of Bakhara Market. One hundred eighty soldiers were wounded and received Purple Hearts.

And, just as television documented the triumphs, it captured the tragedy, too. There was the footage of a badly bruised CWO 2 Michael Durant in captivity; of a U.S. soldier's body being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu; of the off-loading of flag-draped caskets from military aircraft.

Those memories hung heavy during those last days in Somalia, as soldiers cleaned gear, packed bags and shrink-wrapped equipment. Some flew directly from Mogadishu International Airport. But most soldiers were routed through Mombasa, Kenya, aboard two ships, the Mediterranean Sky and Empire State. There, in safer airspace, they boarded charted airliners and Air Force transports for the long flights home.

In most cases, the men and women of Operation Continue Hope say they left Somalia better for the experience--as people as well as soldiers. SSgt. Terry Brown was among those who said he came to appreciate the lessons learned in Somalia.

Brown, chaplain's assistant for the 10th Aviation Brigade, said the deployment instilled in him a love of life and a pledge to expect the unexpected and not take anything for granted. "Life has changed forever," agreed PFC Lavelle Palmer from Co. C, 46th Forward Support Battalion. "I've learned to value the little things: family, friends, a bathtub. I appreciate how precious life is."

And life is exactly what Operations Restore Hope and Continue Hope gave to Somalia. "You can leave Somalia today with the knowledge that you have made a difference," Maj. Gen. Thomas Montgomery, commander of U.S. Forces in Somalia, told the departing soldiers. "Hundreds of thousands of Somalis are alive today because of the things you took part in."

Montgomery lauded the soldier's patience and fortitude in carrying out a mission that teetered between humanitarian assistance and combat. "Throughout all of the hard days, you never flinched in accomplishing your missions," he said.

Infantrymen from the 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry, which served as the United Nations' quick-reaction force, agreed that they were satisfied with their efforts in Somalia, but ready to leave.

"I feel like we've done a great mission," said Sgt. Tony Thomas. "Everybody feels like we did a great thing here, and I'm proud of what my unit has done. Now, it's time to go home."

* * *

The Final Salute

This Memorial Day, SOLDIERS magazine pays tribute to those soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving in Somalia.

PFC Matthew Anderson, 101st Aviation Regiment.
CWO 2 Donovan Briley, 160th Special Operations Avn. Regt.
SSgt. Daniel Busch, U.S. Special Operations Command.
Cpl. James Cavaco, 75th Ranger Regt.
Sgt. Thomas Field, 160th SOAR.
SFC Earl Fillmore, U.S. Spec. Opns. Cmd.
CWO 4 Raymond Frank, 160th SOAR.
MSgt. Gary Gordon, U.S. Spec. Opns. Cmd.
Sgt. Cornell Houston, 41st Engineer Battalion.
Sgt. James Joyce, 75th Ranger Regt.
PFC Richard Kowalewski Jr., 75th Ranger Regt.
PFC James Martin Jr., 10th Mountain Division.
MSgt. Timothy Martin, U.S. Spec. Opns. Cmd.
Spec. Edward Nicholson, 159th Avn. Regt.
Spec. Dominick Pilla, 75th Ranger Regt.
Sgt. Ferdinan Richardson, 25th Avn. Regt.
SFC Matthew Rierson, U.S. Spec. Opns. Cmd.
Sgt. Lorenzo Ruiz, 75th Ranger Regt.
SFC Randall Shughart, U.S. Spec. Opns. Cmd.
Spec. James Smith, 75th Ranger Regt.
Sgt. Eugene Williams, 101st Avn. Regt.
CWO 3 Clifton Wolcott, 160th SOAR.

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